

Immigrant Population to Hit Highest Percentage Ever in 8 Years

U.S. Census Bureau: 1 in 7 U.S. residents will be foreign-born

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While they did not receive much attention when they were released last month, new projections from the Census Bureau show the enormous impact of immigration on the U.S. population. For the first time, the Bureau projected the future size of the immigrant (foreign-born) population and found that by 2023 immigrants will account for more than one in seven U.S. residents (51 million) — the largest share ever recorded in American history. Driven largely by legal immigration, not illegal immigration, the immigrant population will grow to nearly one in five U.S. residents (78 million) by 2060, the Bureau projects.¹ The total U.S. population will grow to almost 417 million — 108 million more than in 2010.

Among the Census Bureau findings:

Total net immigration (the difference between the number coming and going) will increase steadily over the next 45 years, totaling 64 million.²

Absent a change in current policy, the Census Bureau projects that in 2023 the nation's immigrant population (legal and illegal) will reach 14.8 percent (51 million) of the total U.S. population — the highest share ever recorded in American history.³

The bureau also projects that the immigrant population will grow nearly four times faster than the native-born population, reaching 15.8 percent (57 million) of the nation's population in 2030, 17.1 percent (65 million) in 2040, and 18.8 percent (78 million) in 2060.⁴

To place these numbers into historical context, as recently as 1990, immigrants were 7.9 percent (20 million) of the total U.S. population.⁵

The nation's total population will grow to 417 million by 2060 — 108 million more than in 2010.⁶ This increase is roughly equivalent to adding the combined populations of California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Massachusetts to the country.⁷

The new projections indicate that, absent a change in immigration policy, immigrants who will arrive in the future plus their descendants will account for roughly three-fourths of future U.S. population increase.⁸

Other interesting findings in the projections show the rapid aging of the immigrant population. In 2015, immigrants accounted for 13 percent of the population 65 and older, roughly equal to their share of the overall population. But by 2060 there will be 25.3 million immigrants in this age group, accounting for 26 percent of all persons over 65.⁹

End Notes

1 In recent years, on average, 1.1 million green cards (for new legal permanent immigrants) have been issued annually. (Yearbook of Immigration Statistics.) As shown in (Summary Table 1 of the new projections, net immigration (the difference between those entering and leaving the country) is estimated at 1.24 million per year in 2015, rising slowly but steadily through 2060. Allowing for the out-migration of legal immigrants, net legal immigration is still roughly 800,000 a year, which means that it accounts for about two-thirds of net immigration as reported in the new projections. It should be added that DHS estimates of the illegal population of 11.4 million indicate that only slightly more than one-fourth of the total foreign-born population is comprised of illegal immigrants. The scale of legal immigration is much larger than illegal immigration and as a result it exerts a much greater impact on population projections. ((Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2012, Department of Homeland Security.)

2 (Summary Table 1 from the new projections shows net immigration over the next 20 years. Net immigration does include the movement of native-born Americans in and out of the country, but natives exert very little influence on these figures because the departure of Americans is roughly offset by those returning to the country, as shown in Summary Table 2. The table shows, for example, that the immigrant population will grow 17 million from 2015 to 2034. Further, the number of deaths among this population, given its age and gender as shown in Summary Table 5, can be estimated at seven to eight million over those 20 years. Adding growth in the foreign-born to deaths in this population for the next 20 years comes close to total net immigration over this period of slightly more than 26 million. This means that most net immigration is among the foreign-born. This is not surprising given that many more immigrants arrive than leave the country each year, whereas this is not the case among the native-born. It should be added that the number of people arriving each year is significantly higher than net immigration, which is the balance between those arriving in the country and those departing. The Census Bureau provides only the net figures for each year and does not report in- and out-migration separately. However, based on what information is provided in the methods statement released with the estimates, the Bureau is projecting out-migration of the foreign born of 300,000 to 400,000 a year, rising through 2060 as the foreign-born population from which out-migration occurs grows. ((Methodology, Assumptions, and Inputs for the 2014 National Projections, U.S. Census Bureau.)

3 Historical numbers from the decennial censuses can be found at the Census Bureau's website. They show that, in 1890, the foreign-born share reached 14.77 percent of the U.S. population and fell for a time, but again reached 14.70 percent in 1910. These two figures represent the highest share ever recorded. (Table 2 of the new projections shows that the foreign-born will reach 14.79 percent in 2023, making it the highest percentage every recorded. If one rounds the percentages, then the new all-time high will not be reached until 2024, at 14.9 percent.

4 (Summary Table 2 of the Census Bureau's new projections shows that the immigrant population will grow 81 percent from 2015 to 2060, compared to growth of 22 percent for the native-born population.)

5 Historical numbers from the decennial censuses can be found at the Census Bureau's (website).

6 (Summary Table 2 of the Census Bureau's new projection shows the total population, immigrant and native-born, through 2060.)

7 The total is based on state populations from the 2010 Census.

8 The Census Bureau has not published different population scenarios varying the impact of immigration, so we cannot say exactly what share of total national population will be due to future immigration in these new projections. However, there is no question that **future immigration must account for about three-fourths of the future increase. We can see the enormous role of immigration in driving future U.S. population increase in Summary Table 2 of the new Census Bureau projections, which shows that the foreign-born will grow by 35 million from 2015 to 2060, accounting for 37 percent of population growth. Furthermore, the Census Bureau states that there will be 39.8 million births to foreign-born women over this time period. Together, this equals 78 percent of population growth, 2015 to 2060.** (The birth figures can be found in (Projections of the Size and Composition of the U.S. Population: 2014 to 2060, March 2015 U.S. Census Bureau.) It should be noted that some of these births will be to immigrants already in the country and the birth figures do not include estimates of mortality among those born in the future. On the other hand, the foreign-born birth figures do not include births to descendants of immigrants who will arrive between now and 2060, which are part of the projections and represent the full impact of future immigration. There is no question that future immigrants plus their descendants will account for the overwhelming share of population growth. Prior projections also clearly indicate this is the case. Projections developed by the Center for Immigration Studies and Decision Demographics in 2012 show that future immigration will account for 75.5 percent of population growth from 2010 to 2050 and 82 percent from 2010 through 2060. Our projection matches prior Census Bureau projections in terms in migration, births, and deaths. **(Steven A. Camarota, ("Projecting Immigration's Impact on the Size and Age Structure of the 21st Century American Population", Center for Immigration Studies, 2012.)** Our findings are similar to those published by the Pew Hispanic Center in 2008, which concluded that new immigrants and their descendants will account for 82 percent of population growth through 2050. (Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, ("U.S. Population Projections: 2005-2050", Pew Hispanic Center, 2008.)

9 Summary Table 3 shows the total population through 2060 by age and Summary Table 5 shows the immigrant population by age.